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AN ESSENTIAL ASPECT of the appraisal — or reappraisal — of federal funds for local libraries must include some judgment on its impact. The impact of federal dollars on local library institutions — the word *local* here refers to any political jurisdiction below the federal level, i.e. region, state, county, municipality — reveals no clear pattern. In fact, with few exceptions, the literature is practically nonexistent on this issue. There are, of course, numerous published statements on the necessities of federal support; however, these tend to make the unsubstantiated assertion that, on balance, the role of the federal government has been essential to the development of library services.

The central questions relevant to the federal government's role in supporting libraries were asked by President Lyndon Johnson in an executive order issued in 1966. As a result of the order, the National Advisory Commission on Libraries was created to answer, among others, the following questions: Are our federal efforts to assist libraries intelligently administered, or are they too fragmented among separate programs and agencies? Are we getting the most benefit from the taxpayer's dollar spent? The commission was to assist the president's committee on libraries to:

- a. make a comprehensive study and appraisal of the role of libraries . . . as components of the evolving national information system;
- b. appraise the policies, programs, and practices of public agencies, and private institutions and organizations, together with other factors, which have a bearing on the role and effective utilization of libraries;
- c. appraise library funding, including federal support of libraries, to determine how funds available for the construction and support of

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libraries and library services can be more effectively and efficiently utilized; and

- d. develop recommendations for action by government or private institutions and organizations designed to ensure an effective and efficient library system for the nation.¹

The world events following 1966 led to a political environment which naturally placed little priority on the pursuit of the answers to the questions which President Johnson had posed to the commission. This result unfortunately has meant that the profession in 1977 remains unable to provide adequate answers to these questions. This writer believes that until they are answered through systematic empirical analysis, the role and impact of federal funds on local libraries will remain very unclear.*

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT

The historical roots of federal government involvement in supporting libraries are well covered in the literature, but the details of that involvement are beyond the purview of this article.² The first significant piece of federal legislation was the Library Services Act (LSA), an ALA-sponsored bill first presented to Congress in 1946 and eventually enacted in 1956. LSA and all succeeding pieces of federal library legislation, with one exception, were the direct result of ALA's activities in its relationship with Congress. As Molz notes, "With the exception of the Medical Library Assistance Act of 1965, all library legislation (other than laws relating directly to the federal library establishment) has remained outside the mainstream of presidential and executive-branch endorsement."³

It is important to understand that the original intent of LSA, as a categorical aid program, was to stimulate the states to act on behalf of their own constituents. The program was not intended to be an ongoing federal subvention to libraries; rather, as Molz⁴ and others have noted, the opposite was true. Federal monies were thus intended to "incite" additional funds from the states on a matching ratio formula, presumably based on the state's fiscal capacity and the submission of a state plan.

It is impossible to document in writing (although it was confirmed in private conversations), yet ALA was able to negotiate a compromise in the interpretation of the state's requirement for the matching ratio, i.e. the states could calculate the use of local funds and count state library

* I am indebted to my colleague at Rutgers, Ralph Blasingame, for his conceptual contributions to this article. As State Librarian of Pennsylvania during the early stages of federal funding and, later, as Treasurer of the American Library Association, he gained insights which were of invaluable assistance.

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personnel toward matching federal dollars. Despite this liberal interpretation, the states have generally been unable to increase substantially the amount of state dollars available to their local political jurisdictions. The fiscal picture remains basically unchanged more than twenty years after the initial introduction of the federal legislation. Today, local expenditures for public libraries constitute about 81 percent of total expenditures, another 12 percent from the states, with the remaining approximately 7 percent coming from the federal government. It must be noted that these percentages are means or averages, and distort the total effort when one looks at all fifty states. Relatively few states account for most of the funds coming from the federal government—a condition most important in assessing the role (and intent) of federal intervention in the support of local libraries.

In 1965 major federal legislation affecting school and college libraries was enacted by Congress. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 authorized \$100 million to be spent by the states for school library resources. In the same year the college library was provided with its own identifiable source of federal funds by the Higher Education Act of 1965. As Mathews argues, "By 1966 then, the role of the federal government in the support of libraries of all types had been well established."⁵

THE IMPACT OF FEDERAL MONIES

It would be ludicrous to deny the need to receive increased financial support perceived by librarians from all types of libraries. In this respect, federal support of libraries has, symbolically at least, served the useful purpose of reducing these needs. That federal funds have had modest success in activating state response and state-local funding systems for libraries does not render irrelevant the central question: Has the impact of federal monies in the governance of local library institutions been, on the whole, both positive and beneficial for the continued growth and development of libraries as critical agencies in the dissemination and handling of information?

The inability of the library to establish itself as the critical agency in the acquisition, handling and dissemination of information, in the sense that the public school is critical to the educational process, obviously precludes federal intervention. Nevertheless, while the states today pay for approximately 50 percent of the educational bill, they assume only about 12 percent of the cost of libraries. Given the intent behind the inception of federal legislation, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that the impact has been minimal in this regard. In fact, the economic events since

1968 and the end of the "Camelot era," have slowly awakened the profession to the reality that the economy will be one of slow growth for the foreseeable future. At the same time, the financial plight of libraries has dramatically worsened. Innumerable "get-well" schemes have been offered, with each local governance level looking to the larger level (state or federal) to solve the problem of scarce dollars. Why, then, has the federal impact been so slight?

One of the few probing articles concerned with the role of the federal government on local library growth and development was written by Joseph Shubert.⁶ Shubert observed in 1975 that after eighteen years, an evaluation of the accomplishments of LSCA was yet to be made.⁷ In looking at the provisions of LSCA, Shubert found that most state library agencies were heavily dependent on federal monies for normal operations:

Any careful reader of statehouse news knows that state administrations and legislatures generally seek maximum federal funds in any program, with minimum state matching funds. State library agencies have generally found the matching fund requirements and interpretations given by the U.S.O.E. of little help in securing the funds needed at the state level.⁸

In June 1973 a "Group of Concerned Citizens" issued a statement on behalf of the National Book Committee entitled: "The Crisis in Our National Library System."⁹ This statement is important, for it beautifully illustrates — through grand rhetoric — the role of assertion in attempting to shape and influence national library policy. These citizens claimed that: "federal funds have provided the stimulation and the means for *extended services*, for *new ventures*, for *coordination* of activities, for *enriched programs* and *innovative materials*"; that "federal funds are just beginning to provide the basis for a nationally linked system"; and that "the national interest cannot be allowed to rest on scattered, parochial and unpredictable local actions."¹⁰ The last two quotations in particular crisply highlight some of the unwarranted assumptions which underlie the recommendations of the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) for a national or super-information network; they also reveal a fundamental misunderstanding of constitutional law. In the first instance, the assumption is made that a "nationally linked system" in fact already exists. A more persuasive argument can be made, however, that a nationally linked information system has never existed in this country. Further, one can argue that federal and state monies, which have assumed the existence of "system," have retarded rather than extended li-

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brary system development. (The writer will return to this point.) In the second instance, the statement fails to recognize the historical evolution of the library as being grounded, as it was and is, in the tradition of local autonomy.¹¹ Our obsession with "home rule" has been so great that any attempt to erode it has usually met with great political resistance.

If one looks at the consequences of federal funding on the governance of local library institutions, it should be of little surprise to find no clear pattern. The situation varies greatly from place to place and from state to state, uniquely reflecting the prerogatives of a federal form of government deeply rooted in the notion of home rule. That the states and local municipalities (and schools and colleges as well) should open their arms to embrace additional monies — from whatever source — would shock the purist. That these same individuals would equally resist the opportunity to share such resources through some kind of coordinated, mutually dependent system should also surprise the purist. For a rich, descriptive expression of such diverse points of view on the best way to use federal monies to provide library services, one need only read at random the volume of testimony presented before NCLIS in their regional hearings.¹²

A 1974 study for NCLIS concluded:

In almost two decades of operation since the direct involvement of the Federal government, the present system has not produced an effective development and distribution of public library services. The distribution of costs among the levels and jurisdictions of government is *inequitable* and is a prime deterrent to the progressive development of a public library system responsive to the informational-educational-cultural needs of a modern society. (emphasis added)¹³

Such a finding should cause the profession to reflect and to redirect some of its energies in exploring the reasons for the essentially dismal state of affairs. In effect, the underlying assumptions that have been made in the move to involve larger units of government in the support of local libraries need to be questioned. In any event, it should be no surprise to find that the best predictor of strong library programs is not wealth, but aggressive leadership.¹⁴ In other words, a national library policy has done little to modify the historical antecedents of our federal form of government.

The most important observation of the 1974 NCLIS report (and, by implication, its negative assessment of past national library policy) centered on the practical political constraints of federal, state and local governmental relationships. The structure of social values and matters of economic equity and efficiency must be given serious deliberation in

choices among options for fiscal support of public libraries.¹⁵ The authors of the study observed:

The legislation projects neither the concept nor the urging of a Federal role in developing and maintaining a program of public library services designed to meet the informational, educational, and cultural needs of an industrialized nation. Other weaknesses include the authorization-appropriations gap, the inefficiency of "floor" or minimum grants to each state, and the absence of clout in evaluating and administering the state plan requirement. These weaknesses, coupled with the fact that the level of Federal funding, historically and currently, under the Act has been nowhere near the level required to constitute a viable intergovernmental partnership for public library development, give rise to serious questions on future performance.¹⁶

The fuzziness of federal library policy is also evident when viewed from the broad perspective of general informational needs. A report published by NCLIS in 1975 has pointed out that there is no statute prescribing policies of guidelines for individual federal agencies to follow regarding use of the private sector in disseminating information which they produce. It further noted that there is no central location for executive responsibility in government to which private organizations or government agencies can turn for policy clarification.¹⁷

IMPACT AT THE STATE AND LOCAL LEVEL

The impact of a confused federal policy on local governance can, of course, be seen best at the state and local levels. In a recently completed dissertation, Charles Curran has concluded that the basic weakness of the New Jersey State Library Plan was the imposition from "above" of a system on a nonsystem.¹⁸ He finds little evidence to show a positive relationship between the state plan and library growth and development.

Essentially, the New Jersey plan, typical of most state plans, has failed to recognize the need for and provision of the "administration" of the system. In other words, state library agencies have been unable, for whatever reasons, to provide the regulatory authority necessary to ensure that the provisions of state (and federal) aid are carried out in a manner consistent with the intent of existing legislation.¹⁹ The absence of such a coordinated policy has meant that the local political jurisdictions, vying for multiple sources of income, have been able to take any course of action deemed necessary without fear of negative consequences from either the state or federal governments.

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The plight of the county library in New Jersey, literally grasping for its survival, provides a rich account of the perils of ill-conceived library policy. The county library was historically envisioned as a minisystem providing library services to the residents of the various municipalities located within the county boundaries. For that service, the "locals" paid a service fee, usually on a per-capita basis, to the larger (county) jurisdiction. Municipalities in New Jersey counties which have established municipal libraries under R.S. 40:54-1 et seq., however, are exempt areas, and therefore pay no taxes in support of the county library unless they specifically elect also to become county member libraries — a rare situation.

Because county services are also provided by other federal- and state-supported system services, more and more New Jersey municipalities are contemplating county-exempt status. The competition for sources of income among various political jurisdictions (local, county, state and federal) has caused the largest county library in the state to claim that it will have to close its doors unless it receives new funding from a proposed countywide tax.²⁰ Because the will to survive is so great, past history is often a poor guide to current practice. Thus, once again in response to a perceived crisis, the county library, on an ad hoc basis, has moved to the larger political jurisdiction to resolve the crisis. In this particular instance, the county has convinced its state legislators to introduce a special bill which would grant the county the power to include the library in the county budget, and thus mandate all of the municipalities within the county to support the county library.²¹

In the kind of legislative scramble described above, local leaders spend little time analyzing the broader library issues, nor do they tend to care much about the notion of the larger library and information network which will improve information access for more and more citizens. Certainly, those who worked so hard for the federal (and state) support of libraries did not anticipate, or sell the program on the basis, that federal and/or state monies would be used to bail out a local library financial crisis.

In 1970 Blasingame and DeProspero argued that "the system hierarchy (federal, state, regional, and local levels) too often is at odds with itself."²² The absence of a cohesive theory and controls at the state level has manifested itself in a series of indiscriminate decisions, most notably in the disbursement of limited resources to the regional and local public library systems without provision for feedback mechanisms. At the regional and local levels, librarians have been given little guidance in preparing themselves for the rapid changes and increasing demands of our society.

A recent report in *American Libraries* further illustrates the need for a sound, empirically-based federal library policy. It would appear there is no longer any pretense that federal monies were simply to provide an incentive for state and local funding — nor that once it had accomplished this task, the federal government should get out of the library business (apparently Richard Nixon took the original sponsors of LSA at their word). The largest urban libraries have proposed an LSCA amendment — Title V to LSCA — that would funnel acquisition funds through the states to public libraries serving cities with population over 100,000. The Urban Libraries Council is asking \$60 million for the first year.²³ Unlike the plea of the Concerned Citizens group in 1973, which saw federal monies being used for essentially innovative programs, our big-city libraries are requesting state and federal monies for their “gut” resources — acquisitions.

Assuming that Title V becomes a reality, there has been no documented discussion on the governance implications if the federal (and state) government becomes the primary funding source for the public library's book budget. Will there be, for example, a mandated policy of coordinated acquisitions? What degree of autonomy, if any, will the local library institution have to forfeit for such higher-level governmental support? On what basis will the local library institution be held accountable for its decisions in the expenditures of federal and state funds? Will there be a serious concern for equalization?

FEDERAL POLICY WITHOUT POLICY CONSIDERATION

Molz has noted that federal library legislation is loosely clustered around a central context of extending and improving library services in general. The legislation addresses itself to specific types of libraries. In contrast to federal public school legislation, which identifies specific client groups, federal library programs are focused on the requirements of an institutional constituency comprising school, public and academic libraries.²⁴ The point made by Molz is especially important in light of President Johnson's charge in 1966 to examine the impact of federal funds on local libraries. Presumably, his questions were somewhat concerned with whether user needs were being better met; however, the proceedings of a conference on the information needs of various user groups in the United States concluded that the gap was growing rather than narrowing. The conference participants placed hope for improvement on an enlarged national library network, buttressed by the public library.²⁵

The major thrust of this article is that the financial support of libraries

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by the federal government became a policy without the benefit of a systematic, in-depth analysis so crucial for guidelines necessary for implementing that policy, i.e. policy without policy consideration.

The time is opportune for a reappraisal of federal funding. Not only is there a new administration in Washington, but hearings are now being held by the House Select Subcommittee on Education on extension of the Library Services and Construction Act. Unless action is taken by Congress this year, LSCA will have expired on September 30, 1977. It seems to this writer that significant to continuation of federal monies is the reconsideration of the purposes of such support. For example, it can be argued that the federal government has no business funding libraries unless, through ongoing monitoring, top priority is given to the concern for equalization.

For a variety of reasons, federal support both has limited and has advanced financial support for libraries of all kinds. On one hand, there is little doubt that federal dollars were (and are) an important incentive to increase support at the local level. It is becoming increasingly clear, however, that local library institutions view the federal government as the solution to their financial woes. Few library leaders have taken the time to examine seriously the implications, conditions, and consequences of library intergovernmental partnership. For example, how will the strong libraries accommodate their "weaker" partners?

The absence of serious policy consideration tended to obfuscate, if not ignore, the inherent dangers and complexities associated with institutions dependent on funding from multiple governmental sources. The plight of the county library in New Jersey is just one example. The generous interpretation of "matching funds," as another example, resulted in very uneven library growth from state to state. One result has been that those state librarians who were so inclined lost much leverage in their political battles to upgrade the level of state and local support for libraries. This loss of political leverage weakened, for those who wanted such a role, the state library's efforts to become a truly regulatory agency.

As Joeckel noted in 1935, to use the word *system*, in the sense of a public library system, is decidedly misleading. Joeckel further observed that the forces of local effort and initiative—the basis for public library growth—have very nearly reached the limit of their power to extend library service. As if he were writing today, Joeckel then noted:

Meanwhile, the forces supporting a collectivist philosophy for libraries in general, and larger units in particular, are organizing and gathering strength at an accelerating pace. They are faced with many practical

difficulties, both in their future relations to government and in their relations to the library as an institution.²⁶

What, then, should be the role of the federal government to the library as an institution? Molz sees three fundamental concerns: "the support of policy research; the financing of systematic experimentation, and the furtherance of interlibrary and interinstitutional cooperation."²⁷ In this writer's judgment, the last two concerns are inconsequential compared to the concern first stated—support of policy research. The success or failure of future courses of action, whatever the nature of the action, will largely depend on the absence or presence of carefully conducted policy-value research. It should be obvious by now that simple assertion or uncritical advocacy is neither sufficient nor adequate for the development of sound library policy. Greater effort must be made both to question the unwarranted assumptions relative to the issue of library financing and then to enlist the best minds to work on solving some of the important challenges to sound library development and growth.

During the presidential campaign, Jimmy Carter issued a potentially significant statement on libraries. That statement may contain the basis for a modified federal library policy:

We need a new, revitalized effort to save our libraries to make them strong bastions against illiteracy and ignorance.

This is not simply a matter of more federal support, although that will help. In libraries as in other areas, we need efficiency and sound management of our limited resources. We need to organize our library services so that they can effectively serve the public. We need to coordinate federal help for libraries so that the assistance reaches those who need it and so that waste and duplication are eliminated.²⁸

The entire statement by President Carter is important. First, it indicates that he pays close attention to his campaign statements. Second, the statement acknowledges both directly and indirectly the inadequacies of past federal policy toward libraries. It remains up to the profession as a whole to see if sound strategy and purposeful tactics emerge which will reflect a new and exciting era for library growth and development.

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